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THE SECRETARY OF STATE

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Dear Mr. Levine:

Thank you for your letter dated July 14 expressing your concern and that of your colleagues over recent press reports that China may be considering sale of short-range ballistic missiles to Syria. The sale of Chinese intermediate range ballistic missiles to Saudi Arabia highlighted the necessity for efforts to achieve stronger international curbs on transfers of ballistic missile systems and component technology. Transfers of nuclear or conventionally armed missiles are especially troubling in regional hot spots such as the Middle East. They further regional arms races and increase the risks and intensity of conflict.

We and others have raised these concerns with the Chinese. During my July 14-16 trip to Beijing, I urged the Chinese to engage in a serious dialogue designed to curb the proliferation of ballistic missiles. Though the Chinese made no commitments with regard to future sales, they are prepared to continue to discuss the issue in regular diplomatic channels. They denied reports that they have sold ballistic missiles to Syria. They said that China adopts a prudent and responsible attitude toward arms sales, which are evaluated in terms of whether they strengthen legitimate self-defense capabilities and are conducive to the peace, stability, and security of the region concerned. These statements, if backed up by future conduct, are a step in the right direction. Senior administration officials concerned with this issue will visit China over the next few months and will pursue this issue further in their discussions.

We believe that the most effective way of addressing this issue with China is within the constructive relationship which we have developed with Beijing which enables us to discuss our differences in a straight-forward and businesslike fashion. At the same time, we must work to ensure that this issue does not undermine unrelated aspects of our relationship with China in ways that would be damaging to broader US interests.

The dangers of missile proliferation are not limited to particular regions or countries, and the prospects of containing these dangers can be enhanced by strong efforts by

The Honorable
Mel Levine,
House of Representatives.

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other governments in addition to our own. For our part, we will continue to bring to the attention of China's leaders the risks to global stability and to US-China relations presented by unrestrained export of ballistic missile systems and component technology.

In the past, we have described the Missile Technology Control Regime to the Chinese and other key producers of missiles and component technology with a view toward gaining their support for and ultimate adherence to the Regime. In the meantime, we continue to urge all countries, including the Soviet Union and China, to refrain from further ballistic missile transfers.

We welcome your expressions of concern, which we share, over the important issue of ballistic missile proliferation. This issue will remain high on our agenda with the Chinese as we proceed with political/military meetings with senior PRC leaders in the months ahead.

Sincerely yours,

George P. Shultz